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## **‘Grand’ plan of action**

**By Matt Loeschman, Independent Newspapers**

The Arizona Department of Transportation has a grand plan for Grand Avenue, but not enough funding to fulfill all Surprise residents’ wishes.

“For transportation infrastructure, \$64 million is not a significant sum of money when you compare it to freeway construction that moves into the billions,” said Tim Tait of ADOT community relations. “It will make some improvements along Grand, but not that many.”

Mr. Tait told a handful of residents at Valley Vista High School Nov. 7 that ADOT is initiating a study to evaluate potential improvements to Grand Avenue between Loop 101 and Loop 303.

“We are here to hear from you,” Mr. Tait said. “We want to know what you consider the most important aspects or the most pressing needs.”

Phase II of ADOT’s 20-year regional transportation plan provides \$64 million in funding for unspecified improvements consistent with Maricopa Association of Governments studies. Phase II is slated for completion between 2011 and 2015.

The improvements will be in addition to two previously planned Grand Avenue widening projects between Loop 303 and 83rd Avenue, according to ADOT documentation. Those widening projects are part of Phase I of the RTP set for completion by 2010 -- Grand will be widened from four to six lanes, creating three continuous lanes in each direction.

A small crowd gathered in the school’s media center to view maps of proposed Grand Avenue improvements before officials offered a formal presentation. Handouts were available detailing potential upgrades and those in attendance also had an opportunity to fill out comment cards.

The potential improvements for Grand Avenue include:

- A grade separation at Meeker Boulevard/Reems Road and Grand Avenue, allowing better access to Del E. Webb Memorial Hospital.
- Possible grade separations, traffic interchanges or grade-separated traffic interchanges at Grand and Bell Road; Grand and 103rd Avenue; and Grand and 107th Avenue.
- Greenway Road/Grand Avenue intersection improvements.
- Possible conversion of open drainage channel to a close system adjacent to eastbound Grand Avenue between Dysart Road and the Agua Fria River.
- Various frontage road improvements, including Grand Avenue/Thunderbird Road.
- Various landscape and sidewalk improvements along the Grand Avenue corridor.



**Sun City Grand resident Sophia Weber, far left, speaks with ADOT’s Tim Tait who points out potential upgrades on a map of Grand Avenue. ADOT is seeking public opinion on potential Grand Avenue improvements and held a public forum Nov. 7 at Valley Vista High School.**  
Independent Newspapers/Matt Loeschman

Sun City Grand resident Sophia Weber said she uses Grand Avenue almost daily.

"I use it frequently to get downtown, especially during rush hour," Ms. Weber explained. "I find it to be the best alternative."

The seven-year Surprise resident said she prefers changes near the hospital.

"I volunteer there and I see that we need improvements," Ms. Weber said. "And I believe they will really help quite a bit."

Surprise Assistant Fire Chief Kevin Pool also attended the meeting.

"One issue for the fire department is access," Chief Pool said. "If there is going to be an interchange at Bell Road and Grand Avenue, that will be immensely helpful to us. The actual response times will drop."

The chief said potential Grand Avenue improvements would also help emergency vehicles get to areas outside Surprise.

"Sometimes an ambulance needs to get to another hospital out of the area," he explained. "This would make it a lot quicker."

Chief Pool said he considered a Bell/Grand grade separated interchange a top priority.

"Not only for the citizens of Surprise, but also for us -- this would be a major improvement," he noted.

Following ADOT's presentation, residents offered a few questions and comments to the transportation officials.

Surprise resident Ted Carr said he preferred concrete barriers in Grand Avenue's medians, saying they provide much more safety compared to cable barriers.

Landscaping improvements would be a waste of money, Mr. Carr added.

Surprise Senior Transportation Planner Randy Overmyer said Grand Avenue is seeing about half the daily traffic volume of Bell Road.

"Bell Road is now experiencing about 70,000 vehicles per day crossing the Agua Fria River," he explained. "I believe that makes it the busiest road in the entire state. Grand Avenue sees about half that amount, but these improvements are needed. The city of Surprise is working closely with ADOT on this project."

Earlier in the day, about 300 Sun City residents were on hand for the same forum held in the retirement community.

Next spring, ADOT officials will prepare a draft recommendation on preferred projects. In summer 2008, officials will finalize and publish a Grand Avenue improvement study report.

Mr. Tait believes the available funding will allow for at least two major road improvements.

“If more funding becomes available, we will of course have a prioritized list of projects for Grand Avenue,” he explained. “But for now, this money will be able to make a noticeable difference.”

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